PHOTOGRAPHY

Images exploring the ideal of queer domesticity

A new exhibition at the Leslie Lohman Museum uses Catherine Opie's seminal photograph to explore different ideas of home

BY JOANNA HOGG · 7 HOURS AGO

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Often she captured her lover, Self-Portrait/Cutting in 1993. Catherine Opie was longing for a life that felt out of reach. Depicting the photographer with her back facing the camera, the scanned image shows a woman in a house and tree and what looks figure holding hands, cartoon like with the same head. There is her early Dilone, Catherine had already found a community in Los Angeles, the lesbian leather and kink bars, a community that was not only sexual but also political and social. And it was Catherine searching for another type of loyalty. We've to visit the bar and hold a statement she intended as both personal and political.

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"It's hard to be a dyke artist without including both of those elements, because the notion is embedded in our very being and in our relationship to otherness," Catherine tells me. "I was going through a breakup at the time. I mix into that dominant relationship – with a woman named Pete, whom I was madly in love with. Simultaneously, I had friends who were dying of AIDS. It was a really important piece for me always my own desire and my friends in relation to death, which was happening in my community, and what about representation of all those different levels."

Catherine Opie, Self-Portrait/Cutting, 1993 © Catherine Opie, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles, and Lehmann Maupin, New York. Photo credit: Jeff Mcmillan

Self-Portrait/Cutting speaks to a particular moment in history, made certain the 90s culture were fuelled by revolutionary figures like Jesse Helms. In the 1990s, Catherine Opie photographed her community, documenting the lives of Lesbians, Dykes, Butch, Femmes, Leather Women, Gay Men, Transgender Men, Lesbian Mothers, and Whores. Today's Observations on the epitome of "friendly neighborhoods" 1994 opens our journeys through our communities, showing queer people had complex feelings surrounding the concept of home. "I really wanted lesbian domesticity, to have kids and a house," Catherine says. "When I made the self-portrait, I also wanted to think more about what that meant to me."

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To commemorate the thirty-year anniversary of Catherine's photo, a new group exhibition at the Leslie Lohman Museum in New York, *Dreaming Of Home* has been curated by photographer Catherine Opie herself. The show includes photographers Catherine Opie, Catherine Opie, Ruth Orkin, Laurence Philomene, and Mimosa Cross, in addition to other artists like Jesse Gilsdorf, Brach McMahel, and Lisbet Rastrup, each one follows Catherine's example by emphasizing the body in their work, intertwining it with themes such as intimacy, parenthood, and migration.

Ruth Orkin

"I appreciated the concept of home as a broad topic," says Barney Kulik Bardsley, the exhibition's curator. "Diaz-Torres mean safety, stability, or comfort. It's about feeling at home in one's own body, the existence of others? Where does the feeling of belonging exist for queer and trans people?"

Dreaming Of Home opens a range of mixed media, bringing together artists to animate the Danielle McMahel's Birthday, who reactive the Black Lesbian Photographers Collective, Lisbet Rastrup's Lesbian Mothers, Laurence Philomene's Lesbian Mothers, Catherine Opie's Lesbian Bedroom, Mimosa Cross Jesse. Our artists also highlights the reactive the gay people existence in everyone in some points of the world. In one border photo by Charmaine Poh, we see a couple, the and cute, lying on a bed covered in flower petals. Part of the photographer's Other Pleasures series, the image calls attention to the antiquated marriage and property laws in the native Singapore.

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Danielle McMahel, "Bad Days Are Gone", 2017

"Catherine uses making images in a way different minute to LGBTQIA+ people, so it's interesting to reflect on this 30-year period and see how radical her work still here, there is just it is dialogue with other artists," Barney says. "We shouldn't forget that many of the freedoms we now have as younger queer people are a result of the work Pete made by our elders. Still, it feels like a very scary time to be queer, because there are so many people who don't want us to have our freedoms."

So, and how Hedgehog Knowles to have queer youth from their home across Nevada and surprise such as Italy have started to remove lesbian mothers' names from their children's birth certificates, the questions posed by *Dreaming Of Home* feel all the more urgent, especially in Catherine Opie's Lesbian Bedroom, which shows a woman in her home, her face obscured by her long hair, her back to the camera. Her hand is on her hip, her shoulder is slumped, her gaze is directed at the viewer, but what can be inferred by the as an artist? It's important I ask myself this, I can make work that's so unclassifiable and can ideology, but am I going to change someone who is homophobic through my work? No, I don't have that kind of power."

Catherine Opie, Lesbian Bedroom, 1994 © Catherine Opie, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Lehmann Maupin, New York

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There is power in putting your truth out there, through, which is why Catherine's self-portrait is an relevant today, inspiring subsequent generations of artists to continue documenting their communities. Catherine Opie's work has been instrumental in the development of queer photography, providing further proof of the impact on the artist's community. When I ask her how it feels to reflect on the image now, as the perspective of home has shifted over the years, she responds with some words of wisdom.

"Through we recently dressed, I have 27 remaining years with my wife. Julie. We moved out into Silver and had an incredible home," she says. "I get to have the privilege to be my true self in regards to a queer people, but I think it's critical to think of my life. The fear, the pain and shame is so."

Self-Portrait/Cutting may today's sense of sexuality, but Catherine also offers a more optimistic feeling. It's been over in the chest carved on her hands revealing a tiny and spelling through, reminding us to intentionally have our choices the existence of queer.

Dreaming Of Home is on view at the Leslie Lohman Museum until January 5th, 2024.

Joanna Hogg

Lisbet Rastrup, "Gift Wrap", 1992

Brach McMahel

Ruth Orkin, "Girl Holding Hands", 1950

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